



## Summary report of STARS application and participation June 2008

Now in its fifth year, Vermont's STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) is meeting its goals: that of engaging the maximum number of regulated child care, early education and afterschool programs in achieving standards that are associated with better outcomes for children, families and the professionals who work with them.

- STARS is an agent for improving quality by engaging programs in investing in their program's growth. The number of participants has grown steadily since it began in 2004, with no indication that this will slow down.

### **Number of participants as of June 20, 2008**

- 368 programs have submitted applications to STARS
- 271 programs hold certificates in STARS (have completed application process)
- 33 programs with submitted applications are in process of completing the application
- 101 programs have been in STARS for 1 year, 76 programs have been in STARS for 2 years and are in the process of or have completed an annual renewal, 94 programs have been in STARS for more than 2 years, renewing 2, 3 or 4 times
- 18 participating programs closed
- 25 programs discontinued participation by not completing the renewal
- 20 programs submitted applications and subsequently closed or chose not to continue
- 98 of 368 programs qualify for the streamlined process (NAEYC, NAFCC, NAA or NECPA accredited or Head Start program of quality or excellence), 18 of these earned 5 stars by meeting the high standards of the new NAEYC accreditation process or were Head Start programs achieving Blue or Gold Certificates
- Over 7700 children are enrolled in child care, early education and afterschool programs that are participating in STARS

The rate of incoming applications has held steady with an average of 24 applications each quarter for the last 3 ½ years. There is some variability in the rate; for example, there were 6 new applicants in the fourth quarter of 2007, 35 in the first quarter of 2008 and 54 in the current quarter. Public school prekindergarten programs accounted for about half of the surge of new applicants between February and June.

The number of participating programs represents approximately 15% of the licensed and registered programs in the state. While all types of programs participate in STARS, there are proportionally more licensed programs participating than registered programs. This is typical of registered and licensed program participation in local and state initiatives.

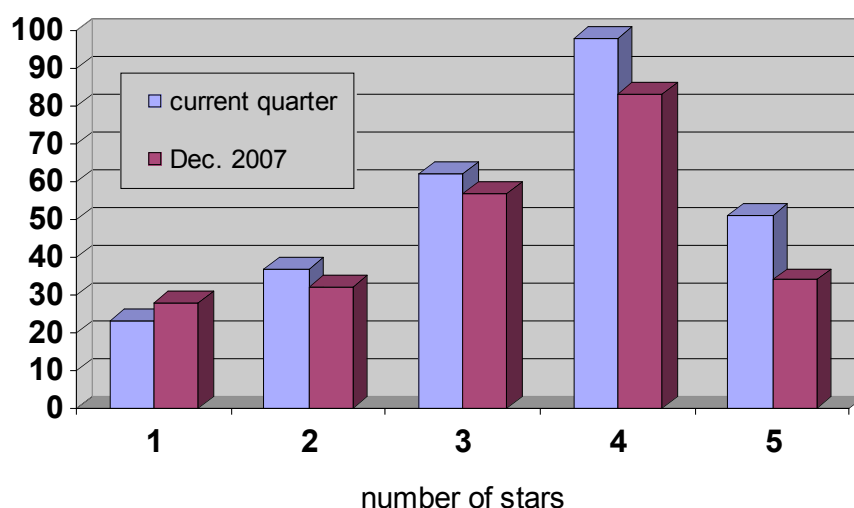
- To meet the goal that STARS is an agent for improving quality, participants will represent the full range of achievements. This shows that STARS is attractive to all levels, not just those have already demonstrated quality through other standards.

**Table 1. Number of stars achieved**

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total
programs at level	23	37	62	98	51	271
percent of total	8%	14%	23%	36%	19%	

The following (Figure 1) is a graphic representation of Table 1 with the addition of the number of programs participating in December of 2007.

**Figure 1. Distribution of stars among all programs, compared to December 2007**



The pattern of participants shows that 22% of the participants are at the 1- or 2-star level. STARS is attracting programs at the more basic levels, with the potential to engage them in investing in their program's growth.

There is an increase in the number of participants at the higher star levels. Some of this is because of an increase in programs with Head Start Blue or Gold Certificates; participating programs increasing their star level also accounts for some of this shift.

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- STARS participants represent all types of regulated programs in the state, including afterschool programs and public school preschool programs. STARS is showing it can promote program growth and achievement in all settings.

Table 2 shows the different types of regulated programs and how many of them are in STARS. As a point of comparison, the last column in the table shows the number of each type of program participating in December 2007.

**Table 2. Number of stars by type of program**

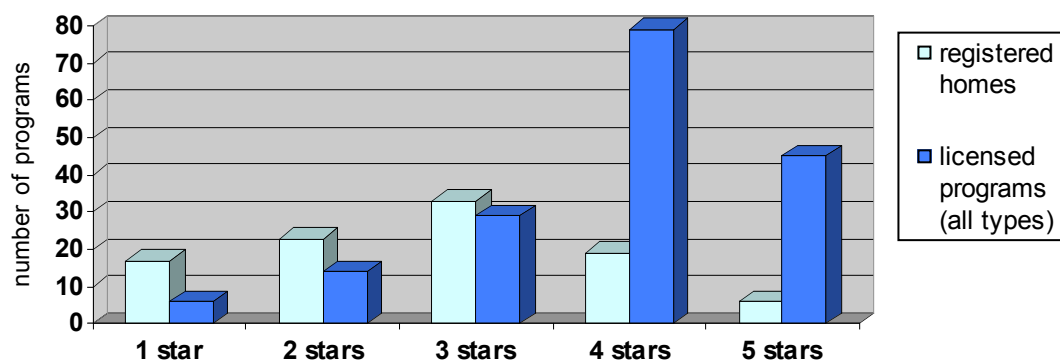
	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total in June 08	total in Dec. 07
afterschool	2		4	7	3	16	15
Head Start				7	14	21	12
licensed home	1	2	6	2		11	9
licensed center	2	12	14	41	23	92	95
public school preschool	1		5	22	5	33	14
registered home	17	23	33	19	6	98	89
grand total	23	37	62	98	51	271	234

The most marked increases shown in the table are with public school preschool and Head Start programs. There are a large number of newly participating afterschool programs; however, this is masked by the fact that a number of afterschool programs discontinued participation.

**Table 3. Number of stars by type of program, registered homes compared to licensed centers**

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total	percent of all in state
registered homes	17	23	33	19	6	98	9%
licensed programs (all types)	6	14	29	79	45	173	26%
total	23	37	62	98	51	271	15%

Figure 2 is a graphic representation of the data in Table 3.

**Figure 2. Number of stars by registered and licensed programs**

(The large number of licensed programs at the 4 and 5 star levels reflects the participation of accredited and qualifying Head Start programs)

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- STARS continues to attract participants from across the state. It is the case that the number of participants per district is not uniformly proportional to the number of programs per district, though the regional differences are decreasing. However, there are still areas where the participation rate is lower than would be expected, given the size of the region.

In Table 4, the number of programs participating in each AHS district is shown. The last column in the table shows the percentage of programs participating in STARS in that region. With 15% of regulated programs participating statewide, it can be seen which areas have higher than expected participation and which areas have lower than expected participation. The table also shows how the current distribution compares to the regional participation rates in December 2007.

**Table 4. Number of programs participating in each AHS district**

	1 star	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars	total in June 08	total in Dec. 07	percent of county
Franklin/Grand Isle	7	3	9	10	3	32	27	14%
Chittenden/Burlington	4	6	8	14	20	52	41	14%
Hartford/ White Rvr Jct		4	5	11	1	21	19	* 19%
Caledonia/St.Johnsbury		2	5	4	6	17	20	15%
Windham/Brattleboro		2	3	5	2	12	10	13%
Washington/Montpelier	2	2	9	5	3	21	17	** 10%
Orleans/Newport	7	2	3	4	6	22	16	* 22%
Rutland	2	3	6	7		18	19	** 10%
Windsor/Springfield			3	8	2	13	10	17%
Bennington		6	4	16	2	28	28	* 27%
Lamoille/Morrisville	1	5	3	9	1	19	16	* 18%
Addison/Middlebury		2	4	5	5	16	11	15%
total	23	37	62	98	51	271	234	

\* Indicates a region where the participation rate is somewhat higher than is expected for the relative size of that region

\*\* Indicates a region where the participation rate is somewhat lower than expected

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- To meet the goal that STARS is a tool programs use to implement quality improvements, STARS must demonstrate that programs increase their point levels over time.

## Point and star level characteristics of programs that have renewed

Programs renew and update their participation in STARS annually. Examining the point profiles for the renewing programs provides information about achievements that are indicators of quality. The results indicate that STARS is promoting program growth.

Application updates have been completed on 176 continuing programs. As of June 2008, 94 programs have been in STARS longer than 2 years (participated in a 2<sup>nd</sup> renewal or more). Three programs have been in STARS for 4 years and are now in their fifth year. There are also 6 programs included here that dropped out of STARS for a period of time and then reentered.

For the summaries reported here, current point and star levels are compared to the programs' original point and star levels. That is, those programs renewing more than once are compared to their starting placement rather than their previous year's levels.

**Table 5. Change in star level with renewal**

	increased	stayed same	decreased	total
number of programs	60	108	8	176

Of the 176, 8 decreased their point levels enough that they achieved a lower star level than when they started. One of these programs went from registered home to licensed home, losing points in some arenas. Three programs were previously accredited programs that had received automatic points and did not verify that the standards were met. The four others were also not able to verify that the standards were maintained. There are other programs that decreased star levels initially and with subsequent renewal have regained or exceeded their original levels.

One hundred eight programs stayed at the same star level (61%). Of these, 60 are 4 or 5 star programs (programs that began STARS with a high level of points). The star levels of the programs that maintained the same level of stars is shown in Table 8.

**Table 6. Programs staying at the same star level at renewal**

	stayed at 1	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars
number of programs	5	14	31	42	18

Among the 176 programs that have been in STARS for at least one year, 19 have opted to remain at a 1 or 2 star level – 11% of the renewing participants.

Some programs changed their point profile, earning more or fewer points across the different arenas. Forty three programs were able to use the flexibility of the point system to gain and lose points according to their accomplishments, yet still maintain the overall star level.

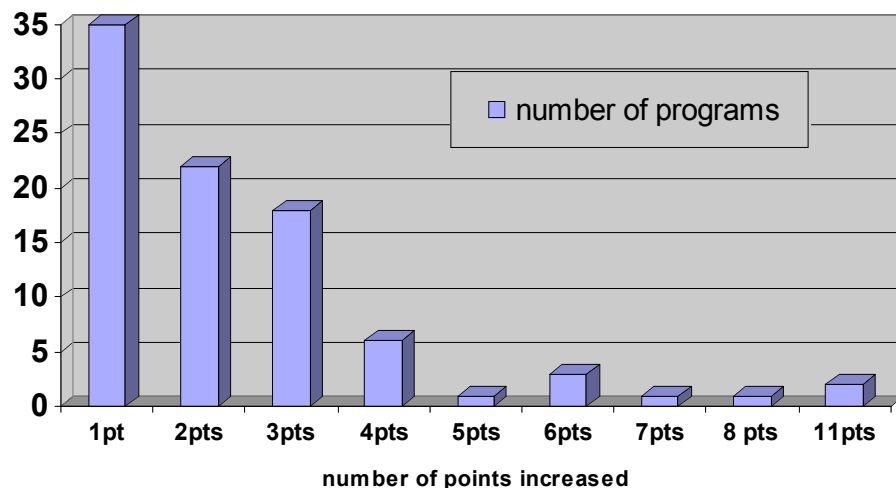
**Table 7. Programs increasing their star level over original application**

started with:	increased to:	2 stars	3 stars	4 stars	5 stars
1 star		8	3	2	
2 stars			5	2	1
3 stars				19	
4 stars					20
total		8	8	23	21

Of 176 programs, 79 (45%) programs increased their overall point level. Sixty programs increased their point levels enough that they achieved a higher star level than the previous year, and 19 programs increased points without increasing star level. Increases ranged from 1 to 11 points with an average increase of 2.75 points. Figure 3 depicts the magnitude of the point increases for these programs.

The large number of programs increasing point levels indicates that STARS is working as a graduated system of recognizing and encouraging program growth and accomplishments. The achievement of more points and stars is within reach of many of the participating programs.

**Figure 3. Increases in the number of points programs earned**



The 79 programs that increased point levels did so by increasing points across the 5 arenas, with 48 programs increasing points in more than one arena.

Table 8 summarizes program increases in points according to STARS arena.

**Table 8. Number of programs increasing points in the five arenas**

	<b>1 point increase</b>	<b>2 point increase</b>	<b>3 point increase</b>	<b>total number of programs</b>
compliance history	35	8	1	44
qualifications and training	23	6	2	31
families and community	39	16	2	57
program assessment	26	3	0	29
administration	29	6	3	38

Particularly noteworthy among the renewing programs:

- The Families and Community arena once again shows the greatest number of programs increasing points – 57 programs increased their point level here; fully 75% of programs that increase their points do so in this arena. This indicates that programs are doing more to engage families and becoming more active as professionals in their community. Programs are also becoming more committed to including children needing specialized services, and more committed to leadership roles. Family and professional involvement are indicators of inclusive practices as well as willingness to advocate for families and the profession. This may be an arena that challenges programs, yet programs are clearly meeting this challenge.
- The Administration arena was another arena where many programs increased points. This arena recognizes business practices for providing appropriate staff support, designing and implementing clear operating policies and practices for families and staff members, and maintaining a financially sound program. The 38 programs that increased points in this arena are increasing their support for the work force.
- The Qualifications and Training arena shows 31 programs increasing points, indicating that these programs documented higher levels of staff training over the previous year. Staff qualifications and training are consistent indicators of program quality and positive outcomes for children.
- Although two thirds of the continuing programs maintain their initial star level, few of the 1, 2 and 3 star programs stay at their initial star level through the second renewal. Of 94 programs starting in STARS at the 1, 2 or 3 star level, only one program has stayed at the 1 star level a third year. Two programs increased by 11 points, beginning STARS at the 1-star level and achieving 4 stars at their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in STARS. Two programs entered STARS at the 2-star level; one eventually achieved 4 stars and national accreditation in its 4<sup>th</sup> year in STARS and the other achieving 5 stars. Four programs started at the 1 or 2 star level and have increased 4 to 6 points to raise their number of stars by 2 levels. Nineteen 4-star programs have achieved 5 stars.

## **Summary of findings**

STARS continues to be an agent for improving quality by engaging programs in investing in their program's growth. The number of participants has grown steadily, with no indication that this will slow down (over 3 years of the same application rate).

The participants continue to represent the full range of program type and regional participation. STARS attracts participants in all star levels, demonstrating wide appeal and programs' interest in receiving recognition for all achievements.

Participating programs are invested in renewing their participation. Renewing programs with room to grow consistently increase their achievements over time, even in subsequent years.